LAFAYETTE HOMEOWNERS COUNCIL
649 Los Palos Drive
Lafayette, CA 94549

TO	NAME
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	AUDURI
	ANDERSSON
	TATZIN
	CITY MANAGER
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	COMM. DEV. DIR.
	PLNG. SVCS. MGR.
	ENGRG. SVCS. MGR.
	PUB. WORKS MGR.
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April 20, 2008

Michael Anderson, Mayor
Lafayette City Council
3675 Mt. Diablo Boulevard
Lafayette, CA 94549

Re: Downtown Strategic Plan

Dear Mayor Anderson and Members of the City Council,

Reference is made to the City's proposed draft "Downtown Strategic Plan" ("DSP") and the Lafayette Homeowners Council's (LHC's) previous letters to the City with respect to the DSP and other letters and various communications from certain of the LHC's member representatives for their respective homeowner organizations.

On March 19th the LHC Board met at its member (and DSP Advisory Committee Member) Carol Singer's home and heard the "stakeholders" presentation by the City's consultant Wallace, Roberts and Todd ("WRT"). WRT representatives Jim Stickley and Steve Hammond gave the presentation. The meeting was organized by the City's Community Development Director, Ann Merideth. WRT's Susan Poliwka was in attendance along with Mayor Anderson.

The LHC asked WRT to present the "process" for the DSP, i.e., where we are now and what we may end up with, all in accordance with WRT's scope of work that forms part of its contract with the City. There was considerable discussion at our meeting and further discussion later at an LHC meeting on April 8th. In our view the DSP process to date has significant flaws. Without a proper transparent process, the outcome will be flawed as well. Substance is missing – there are maps and meetings, but no critical analysis of the two "options" and how there became two options or alternatives in the first place. No economic nor traffic analyses can be found which were a fundamental part of WRT's scope of work.

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Following the interactive meeting, the LHC was asked to provide comments after our review of WRT's display at the Lafayette Library. Our comments and concerns for your consideration are as follows in no particular order:

- The Lafayette Library display was confusing, poorly designed, hard to read and incomplete. It is difficult to comment on the substance of a plan when the information is lacking. The DSP workshops, the presentation to the LHC and what is now on the City website while well- meaning are also confusing and incomplete. The displays need to be re-designed after substantive analysis is performed of various alternatives and the public has some sort of critical analysis to read, review and comment upon.

- We appreciate that an additional twenty-seven (27) maps were released last week, but there is still nothing of substance to tie this information together. Neither are we able to determine whether the January 2007 U.S.G.S.'s blue and green soils and geologic/seismic maps for our area were utilized in the development of the twenty-seven (27) maps by WRT. It is important these U.S.G.S. maps are used as a basis for any planning in the downtown area for reasons already presented to you when WRT's scope of work was addressed and as further directly advised to WRT.

- The deliverables required under the Scope of Work for the consultant have either been ignored or the public has not seen them. There is insufficient information to back up data presented on maps and charts prepared by WRT.

- Nothing has changed since Community Workshop #2 where "concept alternatives" were supposed to be presented and discussed including the "comparative evaluation considering the qualitative and quantitative advantages and disadvantages of each." There may have been two alternatives presented, but there was no comparative analysis performed with respect to LHC's major issue areas such as traffic and economics to name just two. As previously mentioned in other correspondence, "it appeared that the individual stations at the workshop had developed their own plans without taking either of the alternatives into consideration. At the economics station, both alternatives were mapped, but there was no economic analysis done to compare them." It is now two months later and this required analysis still has not been performed and presented to the public for review and comment.

- As previously requested two months ago, the City was strongly encouraged to post all consultant deliverables on the City's website with special emphasis on Task 2.1.2 of the scope of work which includes a "financial feasibility analysis for the initial alternative concepts". This analysis should have been completed before Workshop #2. Workshop #3 is scheduled for May 1st and to our knowledge, this feasibility analysis still has not been performed.

- More than two options should be available to the public for their review and comment. The City and WRT should not expect the public to derive an analysis of the two existing options on its own. Public comments from the beginning to the end of the process should be available on the City's website.

- While the next four public meetings recently announced for May 1, 3, 12 and 17 are a good effort towards public participation, in particular Workshop #3 scheduled for May 1st, the public first needs substantive information in the form of both a critical (which includes traffic impacts of each analysis) and an economic analysis of the options. Why at this stage are there only two options? What has been added or eliminated to now constitute what is being referred to as a "preferred concept" on the City's website?

- We believe a project that appears at this point to be of a significant magnitude and impact to landowners and the City's residents should undergo a formal CEQA review in order that all economic, environmental and safety considerations are properly reviewed and mitigated as necessary. This also ensures transparency of the public review process.

- Many residents and downtown landowners do not know about this DSP "process" or what it means to our community. Only two months have elapsed between Workshop #2 where all of a sudden two options were presented and then the presentation of a "preferred alternative" to the Advisory Committee. The current schedule needs to be amended so that the consultant can perform the required scope of work, including the required analysis. The public then can have time to review a substantive report with respect to all alternatives, including an economic analysis for each.

- Besides not performing the required economic analysis, we can find no substantive review of traffic capacity. The City's circulation infrastructure is severely constrained. These constraints render Lafayette residents vulnerable in situations of congestion to considerable risk from blockages of emergency ingress/egress. Severe traffic congestion (as well as requiring all parkers to pay) would be equally devastating to the City's General Fund since alternatives to Lafayette shopping are close by and residents fed up with fighting congestion or paid parking will choose these alternative cities over Lafayette.

- As part of the required critical analysis, the public needs to be able to review all assumptions that go into the consultant's analysis for each subject area and for the economic analysis. We have not seen any assumptions to date with respect to the consultant's "plans".

- The public does not currently have access to the letters received by the Planning Department and the WRT from Lafayette residents, businesses and property

owners. We believe these letters should be available on the City's website for public perusal.

As mentioned above, we believe the current process for the DSP is gravely flawed. We are therefore somewhat hesitant to comment on certain substantive matters for fear the City and the consultant will skip forward and ignore the grave flaws regarding the current process. That being said and in the interest of working with you and WRT, we do have several additional non-process related comments as follows:

- Insufficient "icons" have been listed under WRT's limited factor analysis for Historical and Cultural resources and areas of community importance. These are further weighted by their importance as key meeting places in the community such as the plaza area around Noah's Bagels and Peet's Coffee. This would also include, without limitation, Diablo Foods, Jenny Bickerstaff's tree located in Diablo Food's parking lot, Diamond K Supply, Millie's, the Nut Factory, and the Roundup. These are all long time Lafayette businesses and are an important part of our community.

- WRT's recommendation of parking behind buildings surprises the LHC and we believe it to be unwise from a public safety standpoint. The WRT needs to provide documentation that this is not a dangerous recommendation in that Lafayette is located by BART and Highway 24. We have a higher crime rate than Danville, a city twice Lafayette's size.

- There is considerable talk by WRT of combining housing over retail or restaurants. That may look good in the planning textbooks, but we have been advised that it does not work well in real communities like ours due to noise, smells and so forth. Good retail and nice restaurants do not generally combine well with housing.

- There needs to be a design correction (as of the library display) of congestion at the offset of the Moraga Road, Brook Street and School Street intersection. Unless this congestion is freed up, efforts at decongestion at Moraga Road and Mt. Diablo Blvd. will not be successful. We recommend that WRT include designs that square off or otherwise free up the severe back-up at School, Brook and Moraga Roads. These two intersections govern most of whatever else happens to traffic along Moraga Road and Mt. Diablo Boulevard.

- Concentration of such a high percentage of the City's housing units (now proposed at 1,000 multi-family units!!!) in the RDA area rather than guiding housing build-out to diffuse itself throughout the City (as outlined in the General Plan) will force even more vehicle trips to the freeway through the downtown, further adding to our congestion problems. Housing should perhaps be spread to areas throughout the City.

- The two options currently shown by WRT show housing MFR and in some places parking placed along arterials and side streets. Our view is that these should be preserved as frontages that are necessary for successful retail within the RDA.

- Further to traffic and parking issues, we question the compatibility of an underground parking garage in the downtown with Lafayette's stated purpose to maintain its "semi-rural" atmosphere.

- References to new parks and creeks downtown are of concern from both an economic and a public safety standpoint. Lafayette has existing parks, ball fields, swim clubs, school yards, bike and walking paths and the Lafayette Reservoir. There are maintenance and safety issues with creeks.

To date the information provided with regard to the DSP process has been confusing and inadequate. We have considerably more comments and concerns, but will end with the request that the City allow additional time for the consultant to properly perform its scope of work and adequate time thereafter for the City's residents to participate in the DSP process.

Sincerely,

Susan P. Callister
President